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TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [NO](#) [XF](#) [KPAL](#)
SUBJECT: "RELAXED" ABU MAZEN IN NORWAY

REF: OSLO 383

Classified By: P/E Counselor Mike Hammer, reason 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary. At Norway's invitation, PA President Mahmoud Abbas visited Oslo April 24-25. His Norwegian interlocutors described Abbas as "relaxed," but focused on ensuring that the international community does not turn its back on the needs of the Palestinian people in efforts to put pressure on the Hamas government. Abbas supports the Quartet's demands on Hamas, but told the Norwegians that he has made no headway with Hamas. One of Abbas's major themes was a call for immediate international efforts to restart peace negotiations; negotiating peace with Israel is something that Abbas believes he has the mandate and authority to carry out. Abbas told the Norwegians that he would be prepared to dismiss the Hamas government in three to four months if "everything is still blocked" domestically. No mention was made with Abbas of Hamas officials possibly visiting Norway in May. We are unlikely to succeed in convincing the MFA not to meet these as officials, if the Hamas representatives in fact manage to get visas to come to Norway. FM Stoere was most pleased with the visit and is energized to push for donor assistance to the PA that does not directly support Hamas. End Summary

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Don't Abandon the Palestinian People
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12. (C) Abbas's schedule in Oslo included meetings with Prime Minister Stoltenberg, Foreign Minister Stoere, Development Minister Solheim, Parliament President Jagland, Crown Prince Haakon, and a speech at the Norwegian Nobel Institute. Senior Advisor in the Prime Minister's Office Arne Bjoernstad told us that Abbas was more relaxed than he had seen him in past meetings, opining that a visit to Europe might be a welcome change of scene from the pressure Abbas faces at home.

13. (C) Bjoernstad said that Abbas asked PM Stoltenberg to help convey the message to the U.S. and others not to punish the Palestinian people while sanctioning the Hamas government. Sanctions hurt Fatah and help Hamas, Abbas told the Norwegians, by allowing Hamas to say "we told you so" to the Palestinian people. It was important, Abbas said, for the international community to show the Palestinians that they have not been abandoned and can trust the rest of the world to help them. The Norwegian press is already quoting Foreign Minister Stoere as saying that Norway will deliver this message.

14. (C) Abbas described the situation in the Palestinian areas as quite desperate, highlighting the problems of official salaries and the maintenance of collapsing infrastructure. As an example of the problems faced, Abbas pointed to the water distribution system in Gaza. This system is under Presidential control, Abbas said, but is likely to be hit by sanctions that don't adequately

differentiate between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. If Palestinian political and physical infrastructures collapse, Abbas said that Hamas is likely to gain further control by meeting the Palestinian people's needs with its own institutions. PM Stoltenberg asked Abbas if Hamas intended, like the Taliban, to set up a fundamentalist Islamic society, for example limiting the rights (and dress) of women. Abbas said that Hamas certainly would like to do so, but would not succeed if they tried.

¶5. (C) Stoltenberg told Abbas that Norway would help to try and find creative means to provide support that does not assist Hamas. Norway publicly announced a support package of USD 20 million (not new money) within the health, education sectors as well as energy supplies. Bjoernstad also said that Norway would support any efforts by the international community to find a creative mechanism to help on the salaries issue, although he acknowledged that doing so would be most problematic if it reduces the leverage available on Hamas.

¶6. (C) All of our Norwegian contacts repeatedly assure us that Norway fully stands behind the Quartet's three demands on Hamas. Abbas specifically told PM Stoltenberg that he too identified with and supports the Quartet's demands, but that the Hamas leadership has not responded to him when he has approached them on this subject.

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Abbas anxious to tread the peace road
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¶7. (C) A major theme of Abbas's visit and a notable feature of his speech at the Nobel Institute was a call for immediate international efforts to restart peace negotiations. Abbas told Stoltenberg that he is ready immediately to begin negotiations with a new Israeli government. Such an effort would be directly linked the Road Map. The Norwegian view is that Abbas believes there is "realistic opportunity" to engage in meaningful negotiations. Bjoernstad told us that Abbas's clearly expressed his main fear is unilateral Israeli action.

¶8. (C) Stoltenberg asked Abbas if he thought Hamas would try to wreck his efforts to engage with Israel on the peace process. According to Bjoernstad, after a slight pause Abbas responded that he did not believe that Hamas would go against any agreement which Abbas concluded with Israel. Abbas stated that negotiating with Israel is clearly his Presidential prerogative and told the Norwegians that he believes that he has credibility with the Palestinian people.

¶9. (C) On the domestic Palestinian situation, Abbas told Stoltenberg that if "everything is still blocked" in three to four months time he would consider dissolving the Hamas government, but not dismiss the elected parliament. Abbas added cryptically that he "has other means" to deal with the parliament.

¶10. (C) On other regional issues, Abbas told Stoltenberg that he believes that Lebanon is on the verge of a new internal conflict. Abbas told Stoltenberg that he supports Lebanese PM Fouad Siniora, but that through the PLO organization he has warned Palestinian refugees in Lebanon not to get entangled in internal Lebanese power struggles, and, above all, not be used as Syrian or Iranian agents. On Iraq, Abbas told Stoltenberg that he believes the U.S. will be in Iraq "for fifty years," and that the only possibility for peace in the Middle East is if the U.S. continues to push for democracy in the region.

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Hamas representatives potential visit to Norway
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¶11. (C) Bjoernstad told us that the issue of the possible visit to Norway by members of Hamas (and their mooted working level reception by the MFA) did not come up with Abbas. The

Ambassador spoke with Foreign Minister Stoere on April 25 to reiterate our position that a Norwegian MFA meeting with Hamas representatives, at any level, would send the wrong signal and be out of step with mainstream European and U.S. views on isolating Hamas. Stoere pushed back, and maintained his position that the MFA will meet Hamas representatives at the non-political level if the Hamas officials come to Norway.

¶12. (C) We again made clear our views to the Prime Minister's Office on April 26, and urged that the PM work closely with Foreign Minister Stoere to make sure that Stoere does not meet Hamas representatives when he travels to region in June. Bjoernstad told us that he was unaware of any planned meetings with Hamas at this stage and reiterated Norway's current position that it would not meet with Hamas at a political level.

¶13. (C) On the issue of visas for the Hamas visitors, Bjoernstad noted that no decision had been made on whether to grant national Norwegian visas if the travelers do not receive Schengen visas. He also pointed out there are strict procedures which must be followed before a national visa can be issued. For one thing, prior to issuing any such visa, Norway would be obliged to inform the Schengen countries of its intention issue a national visa and give its justification for doing so. This procedure, Bjoernstad suggested, would allow other Schengen countries to make their opposition (but not their veto) known to Norway, before Norway issued a national visa.

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Comment
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¶14. (C) The Norwegian government's goal in inviting Abbas was to help carve out a role for Norway in promoting Middle East peace and strengthening its position as a coordinator for donor assistance to the Palestinians. Norway's political leaders are pleased with the visit, even though it did not produce significant deliverables. We can expect that busy-bee Foreign Minister Stoere will be ever more anxious to push for donor assistance to the PA that does not directly support Hamas. In fact, he is under considerable domestic pressure to do so.

¶15. (C) There is no question that the Hamas visitors will get a meeting with MFA officials if they come to Norway in May. The real question is whether they are able to get here. Politically the Foreign Ministry will feel compelled to issue national visas to the Hamas representatives; Stoere will not stand up and say "no" to those in his own party and in the government coalition who will clamor for the MFA to issue national visas. However, the Norwegian government might be hoping that the Schengen consultation mechanism will provide enough of the necessary cover to excuse them from issuing the visas.

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